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Security of Foreigners in Iran

Despite its success in imposing control throughout Iran, the Khomeini regime is not yet capable of providing guarantees of personal security to members of diplomatic missions in Tehran. Rivalries among prominent individuals, political factions, and organizations--as well as the terrorist activities of the weakened, but still active, opposition--make an extended stay in Iran dangerous for anyone who does not blend in with the Iranian lower classes. [redacted]

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Information on specific problems faced by the diplomatic community in Tehran and visiting businessmen is limited. We are not aware of incidents involving Westerners since the unsuccessful attack last year on the West German ambassador. The French mission, for example, has not suffered from the Iranian regime's anger over the Mitterrand government's ties to Iraq. On the other hand, the Fedayeen-e Khalq who attacked the German Ambassador may have been behind an assassination plot against an unnamed "ambassador or charge" foiled by Iranian security in

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early February, according to a press statement by Revolutionary Prosecutor Tabrizi. There is some evidence that Third World missions have been harrassed recently, especially African and Gulf states, but the only incident of which we are certain is the Iranian-staged demonstration and flag-burning by Afghan refugees at the Soviet Embassy last December.

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The Stability of the Iranian Regime

Iran's clerical regime is tightening its grip and will continue in power for the foreseeable future. The authorities are increasingly able to maintain a sense of law and order throughout the country. Tehran even appears to be making progress against the endemic Kurdish rebellion in the northwest. A successful challenge to the regime seems unlikely as long as Khomeini lives. The longer he survives--and we have seen no marked deterioration in his health--the more chance the ruling clerics will have to institutionalize their power.

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The clerics maintain the support of the lower class--the overwhelming majority of Iranians--and have taken special care to meet the needs of this core constituency. Their primary vehicle for this is the pervasive clerical network throughout Iran. The mosque serves as a central clearinghouse to monitor the needs and to distribute required goods and services to the lower classes. The system of mosques and religious organizations also provides the framework for massive internal propaganda and intelligence gathering on popular moods and opinions.

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Moreover, the regime has brutally repressed internal opposition forces. Although dissidents can still carry out isolated assassinations, they no longer appear a threat to the regime. The Mujahedin-e Khalq, the main armed opposition group, was decimated by a brutal government crackdown during late 1981 and early 1982. []

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The regular military has been tamed. Purges of suspected opponents and infiltration of regime loyalists at all levels, as well as the simple process of bringing in new recruits because of the war--recruits that come from the lower classes--have reshaped the regular military. Tensions between the regular forces and the Revolutionary Guards are diminishing as a result. Both appear loyal to the regime. []

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The central government has also begun extensive efforts to centralize its authority. It is trying to bring under direct control the various revolutionary organizations that sprang up in the chaos immediately following the revolution. A ministry has been created for the Revolutionary Guards. The komitehs--a structure parallel to the government to help bring about the Islamification of Iranian society--have been placed under the supervision of the Minister of the Interior. []

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The regime is split, however, by major philosophical, institutional, and political divisions within the ruling elite that often paralyze efforts to implement policy on a wide range of foreign and domestic issues. If these divisions are not settled, it will ensure some measure of continuing instability that could become serious in a post-Khomeini era. []

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Iran is a "mullocracy" in which the clerics rule, but from a variety of different and competing power centers, only some of which are part of the official government structure. The dozen or so revolutionary institutions outside the government structure--such as the Foundation for the Oppressed--only loosely coordinate with the central government and jealously guard their independence.

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Moreover, there are host of philosophical differences within clerical ranks. At least three different groups are discernable.

- Socio-economic activists who favor extensive land reform, nationalizations, and strong central control over the economy. This group is usually refereed to as the "Maktabiha." President Khamenei appears to be a member of this group.

- Religious-cultural radicals who wish to implement Islamic law as Iran's penal code, govern daily life according to strict Islamic norms, and "export the revolution" to other muslim states. Clerics in the Qom theological circle, such as Ayatollah Meshini, have been identified with this group.

- Conservative clerics who oppose economic reforms and who wish to lessen somewhat the clergy's role in the day-to-day running of the government. This trend is

termed the "Hojjatiyah." Hojjat ol Eslam Yazdi, Deputy speaker of the Majlis, appears to belong to this group.

-- Each of these groups appears able to block the more controversial proposals of the others. Thus, several bills remain bottled up in the parliament. Others, such as nationalization of foreign trade, that eventually were passed by the parliament, were returned as "unIslamic" by the Oversight Guardian Council whose job it is to ensure that legislation accords with the constitution and the laws of Islam. Moreover, political maneuvering further complicates the picture. A cleric, for example, who advocates extensive land reform may oppose other equally "extreme" measures, such as active export of the revolution. Loose alliances form and reform, depending on issues.

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Succession remains the key political test. The central characters in the succession struggle are:

-- Hojjat ol Eslam Hashemi-Rafsanjani, Speaker of the Majles. In his early 40s, he appears to be a political opportunist who decides positions on the basis of political advantage.

- Hojjat ol Eslam Ali Khamene'i, President of Iran and Chairman of the Islamic Republic Party. Also in his 40s, he has been identified with the socio-economic activists advocating extensive land reform but is reported moderate on the war.
- Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani, former Prime Minister, now sits on the Council of Guardians. In his 50s, he has good connections to the local komitehs, is reportedly a moderate.
- Ayatollah Ali Meshkini, Friday Prayer leader in Qom and head of the militant clerics society. In his late 40s or early 50s, Meshkini is ambitious and influential. Little information on his substantive positions.
- Ayatollah Hussein Montazeri. About 60, long presumed Khomeini's favored choice as heir, Montazeri exists in Khomeini's shadow, echoes Khomeini's pronouncements.

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The first step in the succession process took place on 10 December with the election of an 83-member Assembly of Experts. Its term is 8 years but no date has been set for its first meeting. Its main task is to select a religious authority, or, if no agreement on one man, to select a council of either 3 or 5 clerics.

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Given the lack of consensus, the leadership appears content for now to have the necessary machinery in place but not to confront the issue. Failure to resolve succession before Khomeini dies, however--especially if the other divisions within the elite are left festering--risks much larger instability in Iran after he is gone.

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Iranian External Relations

Iran is following its "neither East or West" policy in foreign relations. Relations with the US are nonexistent and relations with the Soviet Union are the poorest since the revolution. Tehran is upset over Soviet arms deliveries to Iraq (Soviet shipments to Iraq have been at prewar levels since mid-1981). The Iranians also have been harshly critical of Soviet policy in Afghanistan and have rounded up several East European diplomats for espionage (the East Europeans were later allowed to quietly leave Iran). Last month the head of the Iranian Tudeh Party, Nur-ed Din Kianuri, and 30 other Tudeh members were arrested for espionage. Several have now been released but Kianuri remains in prison. [REDACTED]

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Neither the Iranians or the Soviets are likely to allow relations to deteriorate too far. Moscow still regards Iran as the strategic "prize" of the region and probably hopes for better relations in the post Khomeini era. Iran, for its part, depends on the Soviets to facilitate imports through their rail links. The Khomeini regime, moreover, receives most of its military supplies through North Korea, Libya, and Syria, all of which provide Soviet-style equipment. (North Korea and Libya are Iran's main military suppliers). [REDACTED]

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Tehran has significantly expanded economic contacts with Western Europe and Japan, but cannot obtain adequate military equipment there. Iran has also recently expanded ties with Third World states. It is exploiting them for political support, economic deals, and to "export the revolution." [REDACTED]

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The Khomeini regime remains committed to the "export of the revolution"--especially in the Persian Gulf--but may become more subtle in its methods. Iranian representatives abroad encourage contacts with local Moslems and dissidents, however, even in countries like Turkey and Pakistan with which Tehran is trying to maintain good relations. Selected dissidents receive training in Iran in paramilitary and propaganda techniques. []

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IRAN-IRAQ: Current Situation in the War

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The first phase of Iran's offensive on the Doveyrich River Front which lasted from 6 to 11 February was a complete failure. The original plan called for a breakthrough in the southern sector of the Front by Revolutionary Guards, followed by larger attacks involving both regular and irregular forces in the central and northern sectors. The attacking units eventually were to link up and drive on Al Amarah some 60 kilometers to the West. Iran assembled approximately 130,000 troops and more than 500 armored vehicles, and spent nearly three months preparing for the attack to ensure its success. []

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Iran, however, could not achieve a breakthrough in the south and suffered as many as 15,000 casualties and about 1,000 captured. Iran may have lost up to 50 armored vehicles. Iraqi losses mounted to approximately 3,000 casualties and a few armored vehicles. []

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Improvements in Iraqi performance and shortcomings in Iranian intelligence and equipment were largely responsible for Iran's defeat. The Iraqis were able to construct formidable physical defenses and to amass a two-to-one advantage in armor and nearly a three-to-one advantage in artillery along the front. The combat performance of both Iraqi units and commanders has improved significantly, and Iraq has been using its fighter-bombers and helicopters more effectively. [REDACTED]

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Iran on the other hand, failed to discern accurately the strength and disposition of Iraqi forces in the southern sector of the Doveyrich Front. Coordination between some units was poor, and material shortages severely limited support to the attacking infantry. [REDACTED]

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Despite its initial setback, Iran is preparing for additional, probably larger, attacks on the Doveyrich River Front. This attack probably will be launched this month although the exact timing is not yet certain. It also will be accompanied by attacks in the Al Basrah and Mandali areas. [REDACTED]

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Mandali is near the border due east of Baghdad. Basrah is near the Persian Gulf.) The bulk of Iran's forces were not committed during the attack in February and could attack at any time, but Iran continues to make new plans and redeploy units. If Iran decides additional forces or major changes in its battle plan are required, many weeks could elapse before the offensive resumes. [REDACTED]

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Iran's chances of making major territorial gains in its next attack are slim because it will be unable quickly to redress the

basic tactical, numerical, and qualitative disadvantages which caused its February attacks to fail. Nonetheless, Iran probably is capable of recapturing the 100 square kilometers of Iran occupied by Iraq on the Doveyrich Front and capturing some limited Iraqi territory along the border. Iranian casualties certainly will be massive, however. [] Probably on the order of 30,000 dead). []

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Tehran's Probable Reaction

A second failure on the Doveyrich River Front is likely to convince Iran's leaders that massive assaults using ill-equipped, poorly-trained infantry cannot achieve their aims. The liabilities of this strategy already were apparent last July following failures east of Al Basrah. []

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Regime leaders publicly described the last Doveyrich attack as part of the "final offensive," a claim they have now been forced to moderate. The description suggests Tehran is sensitive to the possibility of growing war weariness and the effect that massive losses and repeated defeats will have on its core supporters--the lower classes--who have provided the bulk of Iran's infantry. []

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Tehran's Other Options

Iran's ability to achieve a decisive victory using "human wave" attacks apparently has peaked, leaving it with three other options:

-- Lower the scale of the fighting, hoping subversion and growing economic problems will bring down Saddam.

-- Move to a more conventional war, relying on heavy equipment. This would require considerable time to prepare, probably while Iran pursued option one.

-- Negotiate a peace agreement, extracting as large a reparations payment as possible.

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Attrition and Subversion

We believe Iran will most likely opt to lower the level of fighting to a border war of attrition while increasing its subversive activities against Baghdad. Such a strategy would maintain the pressure on Iraq while reducing the risk of a popular backlash at home over casualties. Iran could pursue this strategy by shelling and conducting infantry probes along the border. It also could launch commando or air raids against Iraqi oil or other economic facilities.

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The Iranians, who have lower economic expectations than the Iraqis, are better prepared to withstand the economic problems resulting from a war of attrition. Indeed, by discounting the price of its oil, Iran has boosted its exports to around 2.5 million barrels per day-up from only 500,000 barrels a year ago. As a result, Iran ended the year with a current account surplus of around \$4.5 billion, and continues to add to that at the rate of about \$1 billion every 2.5 months. Iranian foreign reserves have climbed from less than \$4 billion at the end of 1981 to a current \$7 billion.

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Iraq's oil exports are only a fifth of its prewar level and its foreign reserves have plummeted from \$21 billion at the beginning of 1982 to less than \$6 billion--the equivalent of less than three month's worth of imports. The resulting cash squeeze has forced Baghdad to seek deferred payments on military contracts and on a wide variety of economic projects already underway. Other projects have been postponed and contracts cancelled. The Persian Gulf states, with economic difficulties

of their own, will be increasingly reluctant to provide Iraq with close to the \$5.5 billion they gave last year--requiring further cutbacks in Iraqi imports. []

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Iran almost certainly realizes that economic problems alone will not bring down Saddam. Rather, Tehran hopes economic difficulties will feed political dissident. A war of attrition thus would be accompanied by a propaganda campaign directed at Iraqi Shias--the majority of Iraq's population--and by attempts to infiltrate Iraqi expatriates to generate unrest. Tehran could also increase its support of Iraqi Shia and Kurdish dissidents involved in subversion against Baghdad. Dissidents could also blow up the pipeline through Turkey, Iraq's sole remaining route for oil exports. []

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Iran could opt to rebuild its conventional forces in conjunction with a war of attrition in hopes of eventually imposing a military solution on Baghdad. This strategy would require at least several years to make a significant dent in Iraq's overwhelming numerical advantage in all categories of major combat equipment. Iraq has more than a four-to-one advantage in operational fighter aircraft and about a three-to-one edge in tanks. []

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The Soviet Union is the only arms supplier which could deliver large quantities of arms quickly enough to have an appreciable impact on the war during the next year. Tehran, however, has been highly reluctant to depend on Moscow for arms because of political, ideological, and security reasons, and is likely to remain so. []

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